VERB CONJUGATION IN MAITHILĪ

By

Pt. Govinda Jha

The verb conjugation in Maithilī is very peculiar and complicated. At first sight the multiplicity of verb-forms seems to defy analysis, but as it is quite systematic and free from anomaly, we are able to analyse each and every form of the verb-conjugation.

The first philologist who studied Maithili closely and correctly was George Grierson. His Maithili Grammar is a precious contribution. But he failed to explain satisfactorily the complexity of the verb-conjugation. He has expressly confessed:

"The conjugation of the verb forms the most complicated part of Maithili grammar. Like the verbs of many partially cultivated languages, it has few parts for which there are not two or three optional forms. These are not local peculiarities but may often be used by the same speaker as his fancy or as the rhythm of the sentence dictates. In many cases I cannot find that these represent different shades of meaning."*

In the above lines he is right in saying that there are optional forms in Maithili verb-conjugation, but I do not agree with him that these different forms are used according to the "fancy of the speaker" and "rhythm of the sentence". On the contrary, all the different forms of verb have and are used in different shades of meaning. I also disagree with him inasmuch as he says that the peculiarity of the conjugation in question is characteristic of partially cultivated languages. In reality this conjugation is so systematic and free from anomaly that it can easily place Maithili in the rank of fully cultivated languages.

It will be evident from his Maithili Grammar that he did not venture to analyse the series of verbal suffixes and to find origins thereof.

It is Mahāvaiyākaraṇa Dīnabandhu Jha who first arranged all forms of verb systematically and explained their meaning correctly and completely. But as he was only a Vaiyākaraṇa the scope of his work was limited. He took the series of verbal suffixes as a single whole. For example, he analysed DEKHALAKAIKA as DEKH+ALAKAIKA though philologically it ought to be analysed as DEKHA+LA+KA+HI+KA.

The name of Dr Subhadra Jha deserves special mention here. His hard labour and erudite scholarship in this field has paved the way for philological study of Maithili. It is he who has inspired many scholars to take interest in Maithili. His thesis 'The Formation of Maithili' is, unfortunately, still in the press,† yet I am fortunate enough to get an incomplete

* An Introduction to the Maithili Dialect, Part I, page 108.

† Now published from Patna University.

proof copy of this and it made my task easier. I can safely say that whatever I am going to state is only elaboration and illustration of what is hinted at in it. There are of course, some points where I differ from the author and go out of the orbit of his thesis.

Before I proceed to trace out the origin and development of the verb-forms, it is necessary first to explain the peculiarity of the verb-conjugation in Maithili. Against the analogy of other Modern Indo-Aryan Languages, Maithili verbs conjugate not only for the person of nominative and the mood, but also for

(*a*) Mood or Tense,
(*b*) Person of Nominative,
(*c*) Person of Accusative or interestee,
(*d*) Degree of Honour in Nominative, and
(*e*) Degree of Honour in Accusative or interestee.

For example, a single English word 'is' may be translated in various ways according to the exigencies of the situation, viz, ACHI, CHAIKA, CHANHI, CHAHU, CHAUKA, CHATHI, CHATHINHA and CHATHUNHA. All these variants are quite different in shades of meaning as will be clear from the following explanation—

ACHI is—3rd person—without honour.
CHAIKA is—3rd person—without honour—in interest of 3rd person—without honour.
CHANHI is—3rd person—without honour—in interest of 3rd person—with honour.
CHAHU is—3rd person—without honour—in interest of second person—with honour.
CHAUKA is—3rd person—without honour—in interest of 2nd person—without honour.
CHATHI is—3rd person—with honour.
CHATHINHA is—3rd person—with honour—in interest of 3rd person—with or without honour.
CHATHUNHA is—3rd person—with honour—in interest of second person—with honour.

A table of conjugation of √CHA 'to be' is reproduced below from the Mithilā-Bhāsā-Vidyotana of Mahāvaiyākaraṇa Dinabandhu Jha, to illustrate the use of the verb-forms.

These shades of meaning play sometimes very significant part in colloquial dialogue. I give here an interesting example. A boy displeased with his mother and refusing to take meal offered by her would say, *JO*, HAMA NAHI KHAEBAUKA 'go away, I will not eat'. Here the mother herself is meant by the boy to be interested in his taking meal, even though eating is always in the interest of who eats. The boy in this way means to say that he will not please her mother by taking meal offered by her. To denote this shade of meaning the boy has only to add a second suffix UKA to the verb KHĀEBA [+UKA=KHAEBAUKA].

Subject	Interestee	Verb	Meaning
सोनमा N		अछि	Sonama is.
"	ओकरा हेतु N	छइक	,, is for him
"	हुनका हेतु H	छइन्ह	,, is for him.
"	तोहरा हेतु H	छहु	,, is for you.
"	तोरा हेतु N	छउक	,, is for thee.
पण्डित H		छथि	The Pandit is.
"	ओकरा हेतु N	छथिन्ह	,, is for him.
"	हुनका हेतु H	"	,, is for him.
"	तोहरा हेतु H	छथुन्ह	,, is for you.
"	तोरा हेतु N	छथुन्ह	,, is for thee.
हश्रो तों H		छह	You are.
"	ओकरा हेतु N	छहक	,, are for him.
"	हुनका हेतु H	छहुन्ह	,, are for him.
रश्रो तों N		छहिँ	Thou art.
"	ओकरा हेतु N	छहिक	,, art for him.
"	हुनका हेतु H	छहुन्ह	,, art for him.
हम H		छी	I am.
"	ओकरा हेतु N	छिअइक	,, am for him.
"	हुनका हेतु H	छिअइन्ह	,, am for him.
"	तोहरा हेतु H	छिअहु	,, am for you.
"	तोरा हेतु N	छिअउक	,, am for thee.

H=With honour. N=Without honour.

To denote such shades of meaning one, two, three or four suffixes are added in series. The verb DEKHALAKAIKA, thus, consists of five elements i.e.,

(*i*) DEKHA—'to see',
(*ii*) —LA, the suffix denoting indicative mood and past tense,
(*iii*) —KA, the suffix denoting third person of nominative without honour,
(*iv*) —HI(>I), the suffix denoting third person of accusative or interestee, and again,
(*v*) —KA, the suffix denoting dishonour of accusative or interestee.

In philological terms this system of conjugation is called the rule of attraction, and the languages having such conjugation system is described as 'pronominalized languages'. For this nomenclature there may be two reasons: first, in this system verbs are conjugated for the persons of pronoun being either nominative or the accusative (or interestee), and secondly in this system the suffixes denoting the person of nominative or of accusative (or interestee) are derived from the mutilation of pronouns. I have at present no objection to this nomenclature in absence of any suitable one, it should, however, be noted that both the above-mentioned

characteristics are found, of course to certain limited extent, in almost all Aryan languages. Take for example, Skr. ASMI (AS 'to be' + MI 'I'), ASTI (AS 'to be' + TI 'he'), ASI (>ASSI, AS 'to be' + SI 'you'). What, then, is the exclusive peculiarity of pronominalised languages is that their verbs take two, three or more suffixes in series while in the other Aryan languages they take perhaps only one.

The phenomena of pronominalisation are found also in the Munda languages of Austric family, in some Himalayan languages of Sino-Tibetan family and in the only Kashmiri language of Dardic group of Indo-Aryan family. It seems impossible to trace out any special affinity of Maithili with these languages. Some Munda languages might have been in the past the boundary languages of Maithili, but they were never its neighbour languages as they perhaps never came in neighbourly contact with Maithili.

In recent decades emphasis has been given on the conception of pre-Aryan culture in India, and some valuable solutions have been found out to get rid of many historical as well as philological problems. And one of such findings is the fact that the pre-Aryan languages played an important role in the formation and development of the modern Aryan languages of India. Keeping perhaps these facts in mind some philologists hold that the complicated conjugation system in Maithili is probably the influence of Munda languages.

But this influence seems not only improbable but also impossible. Within a few decades' contact large number of vocables are apt to creep in and out of the languages in contact. In Maithili there is, perhaps, not a single word identified as belonging to Munda*. It seems, therefore, impossible that without having any influence on vocabulary Munda language would influence the inflexional or syntaclicat system in Maithili.

This hypothesis of Munda influence might have been necessary had there been found no other satisfactory basis of the phenomena of pronominalisation. But actually these phenomena are traced as back as to the Old Indo-Aryan; and it seems, therefore, quite probable that these phenomena may develop extremely in some region and die out in the others. In Maithili almost all formative elements of verb-conjugation are derived from Aryan sources as will be shown below. So, it seems strange to hold that system of conjugation alone crept in like a ghost without carrying its corporal structure. It should be also noted here that the system of verb-conjugation in Munda differs from that in Maithili inasmuch as in Munda the termination for the nominative is placed last which is not the case in Maithili, where the order is verb+nominative+other cases.

The conjugational suffixes of Maithili may roughly be divided in three groups as follow :

(*i*) Suffixes denoting tense and mood. Some of them are, in character, purely participial and others are really verbal suffixes in treatment as well as in origin.

* कुरी and the like a few words are common in many MIA languages.

(ii) Suffixes denoting originally number but practically degree of honour.

(iii) Suffixes denoting person of nominative or of accusative or of interestee. Originally persons are only three, but they are varied by degree of honour. Thus the number of suffixes of this group goes to six.

In the following lines I shall try to explain the shades of meaning and to find out the origin and development of the conjugational suffixes as grouped above.

I. *Suffixes of Mood and Tense*

(1) —LA. It denotes past indicative mood. Its origin is said to be —ALLA (M.A.I.). This may probably be identical with Vedic —TA p.p. (>DA>ḌA>ṚA>ḶA>LA). Examples are DEKHALA 'saw' or 'seen', SUNALA 'heard' etc.

(2) —BA. It is used in future indicative mood and is said to be derived from Skr.—TAVYA (>AVVA>AVA>ABA>BA). Examples DEKHABA 'will see', SUNABA 'will hear' etc. In present day Maithili it is never used in third person, where —TA is invariably used instead.

(3) —TA. It denotes futurity. In early Maithili—BA[(2) Supra] only is found in all persons in future tense, but strangely enough in modern Maithili third person in future is always formed with this —TA only. The source of this suffix seems to be Skr. तव्य. Nowhere in any modern Indo-Aryan languages —TA is found to denote future time except in Maithili. Examples are DEKHATA 'will see', KARATA 'will do' etc.

(4) —E. Originally this denotes present tense, but in modern Maithili, it gives optative sense, sense of present tense being almost always expressed by the present participle with the verb substantive ACH.—as, old Maithili DEKHAE 'sees', but modern Maithili DEKHAITA ACHI 'sees' or literally 'is seeing'. The above source is probable only in case of present sense; in optative sense its source may be Skr.—ET in BHAVET etc. It is very apt to be lost when followed by other suffix, as DEKHAE+HI+KA =DEKHAIKA 'he would see him', DEKHAE+THI=DEKHATHI 'he should see him'. It is found only in third person while in first and second persons personal suffixes (i.e., of group iii) always precede, as DEKHAHI, DEKHAHA, DEKHIA etc.

(5) —O. It denotes imperative mood. It is derived from Skr. —TU in BHAVATU etc. Like —E [(4) Supra] it is used in third person only. In first person it becomes —U or —Ū, as DEKHŪ, HOU etc. In second person, only bare roots (bases) or those with personal suffixes [(10-14) below] are used, as DEKHA, DEKHAHA etc. Examples are DEKHAO 'let him see', JĀO 'let him go' etc.

Here it is important to note that in optative as well as in imperative mood bare roots are followed by personal suffixes in first and second persons. Consequently in the most cases no phonetic distinction remains

expressed. For example, the sense of DEKHAHA may be either optative 'you would see' or imperative 'do see'.

(6) —ITA. This denotes conditionality in past as well as in future, as DEKHAITA 'if he had seen' or 'if he would see'. It is probably derived from Skr. —ET in BHAVET etc. from which —E [(4) supra] also is derived. In classical Sanskrit विधिलिङ् is used in optative as well as conditional senses, but in Maithili different verb-forms for each of these senses emerged from the same source. Such cases are not rare in the development of the modern Indo-Aryan languages. The present participial suffix —ITA (Skr. शतृ), though identical in form, is quite different from this in origin as well as in meaning.

II. *Numeral Suffixes*

(7) —KA. This denotes the absence of honour in third person. In Aryan languages honour is generally expressed by number. But whether this —KA ever denoted singularity in any Aryan tongue I cannot say. This suffix is, however, frequently found in IA. in various shades of meaning including one of diminution, and according to PĀṆINI (5.III.75) it denoted also dishonour, and in this sense its use is found with many pronouns, as TVAKAM, AHAKAM etc. It is, therefore, very probable that this —KA may remain existant even after its pronoun might become an enclitic.

(8) —*NHA*. This suffix, denoting plurality and hence honour, is frequent in many modern Indo-Aryan languages. In Maithili, its use is limited to verb-forms only, with a few exceptions, as LOKA 'man', but LOKANI 'gentlemen', TAKARA 'of that man', but TANIKARA 'of that gentleman'. Unlike the —KA [(7) supra] it never comes more than once in a single word, and remains always in final position. Its variants are —NA, —NI and —*NHI*.

(9) —ĀHA. It denotes plurality and hence honour. It has already been said that the most verb-forms in Maithili are of participial character, so this suffix denotes also the gender of nominative, —ĀHA being used in masculine and —IHA or ĪHA in feminine. It developed from OIA masculine nominative plural —ĀS or —ĀH in DEVĀS, LOKĀS etc. Its occurrence in other modern IA. is doubtful, and even in Maithili only sporadic, being found in verb-conjugation only after —LA (in case of intransitive verbs only) and after —TA, as GELĀHA, DEKHATĀHA etc. It takes always final position.

III. *Personal Suffixes*

(10) —HI. This denotes third person. In the case of honour, it is followed by —NHA. and otherwise by —KA. Examples are DEKHAHI 'do see', KAHALAKAIKA (KAHA-LA-KA-HI-KA), KAHALAKAINHA (KAHA-LA-KA-HI-NHA), KAHALATHINHA (KAHA-LA-THI-HI-NHA), KAHALAHIKA (KAHA-LA-HI-KA), KAHALIAIKA (KAHA-LA-IA-HI-KA), KAHALIAINHA (KAHA-LA-IA-HI-NHA).

etc. It is clear from the above examples that in the most cases, —H is dropped and only —I remains. It is derived from OIA. —TI in BHAVATI etc. It is identical with the Middle Indo-Aryan —HI and —I third person singular (i.e., PEKKHAHI, PEKKHI etc.) but in Maithili it is also found as pronoun third person HINAKA 'his', Ī 'he' etc.

(11) —HA. It denotes the second person of nominative only. It is very frequent in the modern IA. languages. Its source is OIA —TA (as in PAṬHATA>PAḌHADHA>PAḌHAHA etc.). It never denotes the person of accusative or of interestee which is denoted only by —HU [(12) below].

(12) —HU. It denotes the second person of accusative or of interestee. This and the above —HA appear to be very similar both phonetically and semantically, but in origin they differ from one another by far. —HA is derived from an OIA suffix, namely —त, while —HU is an enelitic of IE. second person pronoun (cf. A. S. THU, Engl. THOU, Maithili TUHU, TOHU, Engl. YOU etc.). Due to this pronominal origin of —HU, it denotes the person only of accusative or of interestee, and never of nominative. Here it must be clearly understood that it is the exclusive function of pronominal enclitics, and not of OIA suffixes, to denote the person or the degree of honour of any case other than nominative.

(13) —THI. It is derived from OIA —NTI (as in BHAVANTI etc.), and denotes third person with honour. When preceded by bare root, it denotes also present tense or optative mood, as CHATHI (CHA-THI) 'he is', DEKHATHI (DEKHA-THI), 'he sees' or 'he would see' etc. When followed by another suffix, it looses its final vowel and causes the following —H, if any, to be dropped, as BASALATHINHA (BASA-LA-THI-HI-NHA), BASALATHUNHA (BASA-LA-THI-HU-NHA) etc.

(14) —THU. It is derived from OIA—NTU (as in BHAVANTU etc.) and denotes the third person of nominative with honour besides imperative mood. Perhaps all —THU found in verb-forms except those of imperative mood are probably the result of THI+HU combination as described above.

(15) —IA. It denotes the first person of nominative in all moods and tenses except future. In final position it is generally contracted to —Ī in modern Maithili, as CHIA=CHĪ 'I am', BASALIA=BASALI 'I dwelt' etc. It is developed perhaps from OIA —MI (as in BAVĀMI etc.).

(16) —IHA. This is the real future infix derived from OIA —इष्य. It is found only in imperative second person and therefore is always followed by —HA [(II) supra)]. Examples are KARIHAHA (KARA-IHA-HA), etc.

The above suffixes may again be divided into two categories. The main characteristics of the first category are that they are noticed earlier in Maithili literature, that their counterparts are found in almost all Indo-Aryan languages, that they are never optional, and that they denote tense or mood or the person of nominative (not of accusative or interestee).

The suffixes falling under this category are (1) —LA, (2) —BA, (3) —TA, (4) —E, (5) —O, (6) —ITA, (11) —HA, (13). —THI, (14) —THU and (16) —IHA. In contrast, the suffixes of second category are found only in later literature, have no counterparts of themselves in any other Indo-Aryan languages, are always optional, and denote degree of honour or person of accusative or of interestee. They are (7) —KA, (8) —NHA, (9) —ĀHA. (10) —HI, (12) —HU, and (15) —IA. They can be termed as later suffixes.

It will be wrong to hold that the later suffixes never occur in early literature. For some of them do occur in the earliest literature. But their occurrence in early period is only sporadic. It is perhaps Manabodha (1710—1760) who in his 'Krishna-Janma' first adopted the use of the later suffixes, and after a gap of about a century Kavīshwara Chanda Jha followed him in this respect as also in respect of style, and thenceforth the later suffixes gained currency in written language. But even in present day Maithili literature, specially in poetry, simpler verb-forms without later suffixes are preferred even where the rule or flow of spoken Maithili compulsorily required the later suffixes to be added. As classical RĀJĀ KAHALA, but spoken RĀJĀ KAHALANHI etc.

What is the reason that these later suffixes are hated, so to say, in early literature ? In similar cases it is generally said that the later classical sanction of a word or construction is a sign of its being developed in later time. But in the present case I find no evidence to believe that they have been developed later. On the contrary, their sources of origin and occurrence, though sporadic, in the earliest period show that they are expected to have existed since the earliest period of Modern Indo-Aryan languages.

One of the reasons seems to be the fact that the verbs formed with the later suffixes were regarded as vulgar. George Grierson in his Maithili Grammar has hinted this very fact by stating "like the verbs of many partially cultivated languages, it has few parts for which there are not two or three optional forms". By the expression "partially cultivated" he perhaps means the vulgar form of the speech. No data are available for tracing back the forms of vulgar speech of the past, and nothing, therefore, can definitely be said in this respect. But on the evidence of the present form of spoken Maithili, it seems wrong to hold that the verbs formed with later suffixes belong to vulgar speech, for all these forms are used even in the pure aristocratic and highly educated families in every con and corner of Mithila. I am, therefore, of the opinion that they may be the exclusive characteristic of the spoken form of the tongue, but they have been never considered vulgar.

As already stated, the later verb-forms are totally optional, and can easily be substituted by simple ones. For example, the verb DEKHALA 'saw' can be substituted for all forms consisting of it i.e. DEKHALAKA, DEKHALAKAIKA etc. And this highly optionality of these forms might be one of the reasons for their rare occurrence in the literature.

THE JOURNAL
OF THE
BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY

VOL. XLIV SEPTEMBER—DECEMBER, 1958 PARTS III & IV



PUBLISHED BY
THE BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY, PATNA
Price Rs. 10/-